HOW I WON THE WORLD'S CHAMPIONSHIP.

BY HENRY E. SEARLE,

Champion Single Sculler of the World.

[Our cable message published to-day tells of the death of Searle, the champion sculler, cut off in the prime of manhood and the hay-day of honourable prosperity. The following record of his career, and his own narrative of how he won his last great race, taken from the "Leeds Times," will be read with interest.]

The British public, through the Press and in other ways, have taken so mach interest in me since I attained the position of Champion Sculler of the World, and have been so hospitable and kind, that I venture to give the following account of myself with a view to satisfy all legitimate curiosity they may have in regard to myself and my doings, A further reason that urges me to this course is that it will, once and for all, relieve me from the necessity of answering needless questions, however pleasurable they may be, to each fresh questioner become somewhat tedious to the replier.

My full name then is Henry Ernest Searle. I was born on the 14th day of July, 1866, in Queen's-street, at Grafton, on the Clarence River, in N.S.W., and am now 23 years of age. Both my parents are of English birth, and they went out to Australia to settled just as Grafton was being settled, it was very small and very wild when my father first took up his abode there; sugar-cane and maize growing, cattle raising, and mining being the chief industries which attracted colonists. In a few years it became an important centre, and is now a large and flourishing city. It has a noble situation on the Clarence River, which is here about half-a-mile wide; the site of the town being about 45 miles from the Heads, as we call the mouth of that river. The Clarence is a fine broad river, to which the Thames in comparison is but a creek. Its rise and fall does not average more than 6ft., except in heavy rains; it has long reaches of from five to six miles, straight as a racecourse, so that it is admirably suited as a nursery for oarsmen, and it is no wonder that it has turned out many and good ones. But in my young days there was very little shipping on it.

After living seven years at Grafton, and while I was still a mere child, my father shifted to Esk Island, which he had bought, and there he set up farming maize, cane etc. Elk Island is about 40 miles from Grafton, and so much nearer the Heads. There I grew up, at first attending school, and then assisting my father in his farming operations. When at school we had to row three and a half miles either way, for in those days roads were few and far between, and water travelling was the usual mode of progression. In fact, life at Esk Island was not unlike what life must be in Venice. It is not, therefore, surprising that from an early age I took kindly to the sculls. The boat contained my sister and my younger brother. We used often to race other boats bound on the same errand, and I may add that the Searle boat generally showed the way. I always had a great ambition for rowing, and, used often to say that I wished to become to become a sculler. In my boyish attempts I put in all I knew of hard work, and, as I have said, very successfully, so that I soon got known as a smart lad. When I was 17 my father bought me m racing skiff, and in that I practiced for twelvemonth. Next year, at the age of 18, there was a local regatta at Chatsworth

Island for all comers in watermen's skiffs for which I entered and scored my first win in my first public race. This was a happy augury for my future success. I need scarcely say that Trickett's reputation had reached me as a boy when I was at school or working with my father, and his many victories had fired my ambition. Trickett was often the subject of our conversations, and when we had any great match on I used often to say to my father “I wonder who is going to win today's race”, and I generally managed to pick the winner.

After winning a few races I often told, my parents, in my youthful enthusiasm, that I wanted to be the Champion Sculler of the World.

My next race was at Harewood Island, in waterman's skiffs, double sculls. My partner was F. Fisher. Three pairs started, and we rowed second, but the first boat being disqualified we got the prize. The same day in a youths' race, age 19, I scored another win; and a few months later at the same place, against all-comers, in light skiffs over a 3½ mile course, level start, I beat M. Wallace and M, Driscoll who were both reckoned very good men. On the same day I suffered defeat in a mile race M. Wallace kindly showing mo the way home. I have on more than one occasion returned him the compliment since G. Baker was third on tins occasion. My next race was again at Chatsworth Island in light skiffs, level start, and again I got the victory, beating A. Baker, M Wallace, G. Bush, and L. Pringle. After this race I got handicapped. For instance, at the regatta at Yamba I had a 10 lb, handicap against A. Baker and M. Wallace, who were at feather-weight. Owing to rough weather my boat was nearly swamped, but though it was half full of water I managed to come in second, Baker being first. All this time I was doing my regular work at the farm, seeing to things, and generally assisting my father; but I would take half an hour in the morning or in the evening for practice.

My next race, if I remember rightly, was at Palmer's Island. I thon had 16 lb. handicap, A. Baker 16 lb , Wallace 10 lb., and G. Baker feather-weight. I won, Wallace being second. I rowed again at Palmer’s Island with 281b. handicap, A. Baker 81b., Wallace 71b., and Reid a feather. After a good race, I leading about a mile, my weight began to tell, and Baker passed me, though I managed to follow him home a good second. Then I rowed a match with M. Wallace, at Chatsworth, over a 2½ mile course, and won easily, A fortnight later I rowed a match with S. Davis, also over a 2½ mile course. It was a clinking race for the first half-mile, but I beat him easily at the finish.

It was, I think, in 1887 that I rowed at Maclean a time allowance skiff race, receiving 20 seconds from D McDonald, one of the best scullers for his weight that over got into a boat. He was a small man, but game as a pebble. He was in the Trickett, Laycock, and Rush set, so that this occasion afforded mo my first chance of seeing what I could do against men of world-wide reputation. Two others were also in the raco, A. Baker with 26 seconds start, and M Wallace with 45 seconds. I soon caught up Baker, and after a mile and a-half, passed Wallace, leading easily home, McDonald coming in a good second.

A month or two later at Chatsworth, I rowed my first skiff race. I was handicapped at 35 lb. against A. Baker, 20 lb, R. J. Brown, 15 lb,, and M. Wallace, featherweight. It was a good race to the first stake boat. There Brown and I fouled, and I getting the worst of the foul, they all got round before me, and I had to renew a stern chase

which was not, however, as long as the proverbial one, for I came up, hand over hand, and won I by about two lengths with a bit up my sleeve. Wallace was second.

My father then wished mo to take a twelve months' spell from racing least I should overstrain myself; he was always most anxious in that respect, and I wisely took his advice, and by means of the rest got thoroughly well set up and matured. Many a rising athlete goes to pieces just at this critical time by overworking his powers before the framework of the body has got properly set. Of course, during my rest I kept up my practice, so as not to rust, but on the whole I had just then a very quiet time of it.

I now took to rowing in wager boats for the first time, and on January 2, 1888, rowed my first race in one at my birthplace, Grafton. The following entered for the race:- Hanlan, scratch; C. Neilson, three and a half lengths start; W. Hearn, the New Zealand champion, four and a half lengths start; and myself, who received seven lengths. We all paddled to the scratch, and got to our moorings, when, just as the flag was about to fall, Hanlan quietly says, "I guess I won't start; I don't feel well" and off he went a quarter of a mile ahead of us all, determined to see the race if he did not take part in it. I thus missed my opportunity of trying what I could do with the redoubtable Canadian. We got the signal, and off we went at a rattling pace. I kept my distance throughout, and won by just the number of lengths I had received. How I wished Hanlan had rowed. The race was a terrible struggle for a mile between Neilson and myself, but I pulled through at the finish. Neilson was second.

After this race I took a trip to Sydney, 350 miles from the Clarence River, with letters of introduction to gentlemen who were known to take a great interest in Australian sculling. I there for the first time met my friend Mr. Neil Matterson. I told him I had come down to see if I could do a little rowing, and, with his usual kindness, he said he would see if he could got a match on for me. This resulted in my rowing against Wulf for £100, aside over the championship course on the Paramatta River. I won easily. A fortnight later 1 met on the same course Jim Stansbury for £100 a-side. This was the hardest race I ever rowed in my life. After the severest struggle I just managed to get in first, beating all records, for I did the 3 miles 330yds. in 19min. 53sec. This was the fastest race ever rowed on the Paramatta River. I had had quite enough of it, and was heartily glad when I got past the post. For a mile and a half we were dead level, and straining every muscle to get an inch on one another. Stansbury is only 22, a year younger than I am, and scales 12st 2lb when in condition, so that it may be imagined he is no chicken to row against.

In the September of the same year I rowed over the same course against C. Neilson for £200 a-side and won rather easily. A fortnight later I rowed W. Hughes at Newcastle, Hunter River, for £180 a-side, and allowed him 10 seconds start. The day was very rough, and when we had gone about half a mile my boat sprung a leak and began to fill rapidly, so that I had to make the best use of my time to get to the post. I need scarcely say that I did so, but just before getting home the plug flew out of my boat, and I was compelled to take off my cap to stuff up the hole with. I got home 12 lengths to the good, but only just in time for all that, for just as the post was passed my boat went below the waterline, and I alone remained visible.

I was now matched against Peter Kemp, the champion sculler of the world, over the championship course on the Parrmatta River. We rowed October 28, 1888, and a great

day that was for me, for after a pretty good race for a mile I went ahead, and when the post was passed I was left in the proud position of champion, and the dreams of my early I boyhood had come true.

Of course, I do not pretend to give all the races I have rowed - to do so I should have to refer to papers for dates and particulars; but I have jotted down such as are most likely to interest the public.

In December I rowed at a great regatta at Brisbane for prizes of £300, £200, and £100. Among the competitors, were Kemp, Beach, Neilson, Stansbury, Neil Matterson, McLear, [Mclean?] and others. After three or four days' racing, Matterson, Kemp, and myself were left in for the final, and we finished in reversed order -, I first; then Kemp; and Matterson third.

The Americans now talked a lot of sending someone over to beat me, and a match was made between Teemer and myself. But it came to nothing, its Teemer did not row, and paid forfeit the £100 deposit. Seeing now there was no opportunity of getting on a match at home, I thought I would come to England, and so I accepted the challenge of O'Connor, the Canadian champion to row on the Thames. I came over accompanied by my friends, Messrs, Crane, Carter, and Matterson. Mr. Crane acted for my chief supporters, Messrs. T. and J. Spencer, who were prevented by business reasons from coining over with me. No sculler has had warmer, stauncher, and truer friends than I have had; no expense or trouble has been spared by them to get me fit and into winning form.

For my race with O'Connor I was trained by Neil Matterson. Mr. Crane also superintending the preparations. I don't think they found me very troublesome, for I always make a point when I have a race on to go in for it thoroughly. In short I like to attend to my work. My training system is as fallows: Rise about 6 or 6.30, and strike dumb-bells for about ten minutes, then for a two-mile run on an egg and sherry and a biscuit; breakfast at 8, that meal consisting of a steak or chop, eggs, toast, and tea. After breakfast, as after every meal, I take a rest; then I go a six-mile walk, and at 11 start for a five or six mile row. Dinner at 1 p.m. At that meal I take roast, meat, fowl, plenty of cabbage or cauliflower, but no potatoes; custards and jelly, hut no pastry, and plenty of fruit. After about an hour's rest I take a four-mile walk, mid a three or four mile row, according lo my average weight; if I am a bit too heavy I take a little extra work. If I am a good weight I take things more leisurely. I have tea at 6 o'clock, and a take a stake of stewed fowl, grilled pigeon, or boiled turkey; then another six or seven miles on foot, have a few more minutes with the dumb-bells and then to bed at 10 p.m. Three days before the race I knock off all luxuries in the way of custards, fruit, &c. I like my food well-dome, and can not eat anything that is underdone, so that raw steak training has no attraction for me, and, in fact, I consider it an altogether superfluous article. On the morning or afternoon of a race I have a chicken, some toast, und just enough tea to quench my thirst, about four hours, before the start, and nothing else until it is over.

In my race with O'Connor I had nothing to oat or drink for a good four hour before, only just as I got into my boat I rinsed out my month with n little water. I looked upon O'Connor as a first rate sculler, and I knew I should have all my work cut out to beat him, and so I told my friends. Ho rows a good scientific stroke, but does not reach out

as far or use his back as much ns I do But, for all that he ran get along at a terrific pace, and ho gave mo a terrible shacking up us fur as Hammersmith. I felt all the way there that the race was to be fought out every inch, but after passing Hammersmith bridge I felt that I was safe, and that the victory was in my grasp, bar accidents. After I caught him up, for at the start he got away from me and led for nearly a quarter of a mile, we rowed level, stroke and stroke, for half a mile, then I forged ahead a little, but O'Connor spurted gamely, and again succeeded in leading me, in my judgment by half a length; I then spurted and pulled my hardest, and after a long struggle succeeded in obtaining a slight advantage over him, and after he never came up to me again. Though I held him in hand after Hammersmith it was by no means an easy race, and I was putting backbone into my stroke until I passed the winning post. O'Connor and his supporters are thorough and upright sportsmen, and we had a fair race, and no favour. Though a better course there might ho in some respects than the Putney to Mortlake course there is none in the world where a fairer race may, be rowed. I shall always feel grateful for the handsome way I have been received in the Old Country, my only regret being that I have had no opportunity of meeting an English sculler on English waters. I close with the remark that I hope, until England wins back the championship, it may remain in Australian hands.

End.

The Mercury (Hobart, Tas.) 11 Dec 1889